

# **Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes July 27-28, 2006**

# Vocational Rehabilitation Council

## July 27-28, 2006

### Fort Belknap College

**Members present:** David Boyd, Dan Burke, Denise Corrao, Maureen Kenneally, Carol Lambert, Wayne Nankivel, Paul Pearson, Ruth Straley, Arlene Templer, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Michelle Williamson

**Members absent:** Kermit Horn, Dennis Moore, Faith Dawson, Don Jones, Jackie Colombe, Jim Daily, Dalayna Faight, Sharla LaFountain, Ron Mills

**Staff and guests present:** Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Barbara Varnum, Brigitte Winfield, Bob Jahner, Doug Robinson, Meredith Ewer-Speck, Scott Williamson, Mavis Young Bear, Buster Moore, Quintin Kingfisher, Kathy Laurin, Sharyl Wells and 2 other representatives from Blackfeet, Max Bear, Lynn Winslow, Liesl Beck, Julia Doney, Trish Kinnely, Evelyn Oats, Jim Fox

#### **Thursday, July 27 2006**

Buster Moore, from the Fort Belknap Section 121 VR Project, opened the meeting with a prayer in both Assiniboine language and in English. Julia Doney welcomed the group and gave introductory remarks. Joe Mathews and Arlene Templer presented Mavis Young Bear, David Boyd, and the Fort Belknap Tribal Council with gifts.

#### **The big picture in VR**

Joe Mathews talked about happenings on the national level and on the state level. On the national level, the Senate recently passed its version of the Workforce Investment Act, which came as a surprise to many people—word on the street was that it would not be passed this year. However, the Senate version differs from the version passed by the House of Representatives. The House wants more of a block-granted program, while the Senate wants to keep programs coordinated, but separate. The next step is for a conference committee to be appointed. If the bill is to be passed, it needs to occur by the end of 2006 or the process will start over. Generally the law is reauthorized every 5 years, but the last reauthorization was 1998. (Note: the federal Rehabilitation Act—VR law—is part of the Workforce Investment Act). There is still some talk about whether to make the Section 121 Native American VR Projects discretionary (you have to apply for the grant every 5 years, and not everyone gets one) or formula (everyone gets one, but the funding per grant will be less).

Joe also talked about the federal appropriations. VR is entitled to a cost of living increase each year. Montana is currently matching all of its federal funds, and this year we are slightly overmatched. We can ask for extra federal funds in August, and we will do that.

On the state side, we just ended our state fiscal year, and we ended up well fiscally. "Order of Selection"—the priority for serving people when there is not enough money to serve everyone—is still on the radar screen, but Montana VR is trying as hard as possible to avoid implementing it. Nationwide, over half the VR agencies are in Order of Selection.

Next week, VR federal representatives from Washington, DC are coming to Montana. This is the first time they have visited since the federal regional offices were closed last year. Joe plans to take the federal representatives to Billings and Miles City. In Miles City they will meet with VR staff, some of the Council members (Carol, Denise, Ron, and David), and a Section 121 representative (Quintin).

The Legislature will meet in January, and we have made our initial budget presentation to the Governor's Office. There is some concern about CI-97 which says that state government may grow only at the rate of inflation. If CI-97 passes in November, it may affect budget requests in the Legislature.

MVR is still recruiting for a counselor in Havre. This position has a large travel territory—all the way to the North Dakota border, and not many people have applied for it. The Havre counselor works with 32 high schools, helping students with disabilities enter into adult services. Normally a VR counselor must have a master's degree, but VR is willing to hire someone with a bachelor's degree, and pay for them to get their masters degree through distance learning. Mavis stated that Fort Belknap has two staff people enrolled at San Diego State University.

### Announcements

- Peggy Williams stated that Dennis Moore, who fell from his roof while trimming trees in June, has been moved to Utah. He is still on a ventilator, and he is paralyzed from his neck down. He can talk and shrug his shoulder.
- Peggy asked if anyone was interested in attending the Montana Association of Rehabilitation Conference October 25-27 in West Yellowstone. (Update: no one has come forward on this, so if you are interested, let Arlene or Peggy know).
- Peggy reported on a teleconference she attended regarding state rehabilitation councils. The councils are trying to develop a national presence, and are planning an all day meeting at CSAVR this fall.
- Peggy mentioned that there may be some regional training (computer-based) for state rehabilitation members this fall.
- Carol reminded the Council about the Statewide Independent Living Council Symposium on August 22 – 24 in Missoula.
- Quintin stated the Native American Brain Injury Conference was well attended and had solid presenters.

### Strategic Plan

Peggy went over progress on the VR Strategic Plan. Many of the goals have been addressed. See the handout for specifics.

### Extended Employment

Barbara Varnum discussed VR's Extended Employment program. These services are for people with the most significant disabilities who cannot work in a regular (competitive) job. Most of the people in this program have a traumatic brain injury, a mental illness, or a developmental disability. There is a waiting list for this program. VR contracts with Rocky Mountain Rehab to administer the program. Rocky Mountain Rehab/Reg Gibbs then contracts with community rehabilitation programs (CRP) across Montana to provide services. There are two types of services: sheltered employment where the consumer works in the CRP and supported employment where the consumer works in the community, and is helped by a job coach. The last legislature gave the program an additional \$210,000 per year, and 125 people came off the waiting list.

Barb has been accompanying Reg to visit CRPs. Reg does review a certain number of cases and he does send out an annual survey to the consumers. However, he does not typically meet with any of the consumers. Barb mentioned that the CRP manages the case, and if there were any problems, there would not be an advocate for the consumer. Lynn Winslow mentioned that although the Client Assistance Program would not serve these consumers because they are no longer direct VR consumers, another part of the Montana Advocacy Program might serve them. Barb will follow up on that.

### Blind and Low Vision Services

Doug Robinson, BLV supervisor in Great Falls, reported that Blind and Low Vision Services is now fully staffed. BLV consists of 3 programs—employment, older blind (independent living services for people over age 55), and Visual Medical. BLV has four offices: Billings, Missoula, Great Falls and Butte. In each office there are four staff members: a counselor, vision rehabilitation therapist (rehabilitation teacher), orientation and mobility specialist, and a support person. In the older blind program, BLV is seeing greater numbers of people that can use the services. For Native Americans, they are seeing more diabetic retinopathy needs, and for Caucasians, they are seeing more macular degeneration.

BLV is looking at doing more group training sessions in their office. Upcoming training includes orientation and mobility skills and assistive technology. Doug is also looking at trying to develop the skills of paraprofessionals to help deliver equipment. BLV is doing more extended training at out of state facilities, because they are more specialized. Doug has noticed a large problem with transportation---you cannot get from Glasgow to Great Falls. The Transportation Advisory Councils are important in developing the transportation network.

Doug stated that he has been trying to reach out to Tribes. Section 121 Native American VR projects do not have many services to blind and low vision people. Max (Fort Peck Section 121) shares 4 consumers with Doug. Doug has a large travel territory, and he tries to be in each community every 6 weeks.

Lunch was provided by Fort Belknap, and we enjoyed the Fox Fiddle Players.

### Cultural Training

Mavis presented to the Council on cultural issues including cultural sensitivity, Native learning style, and traditional rules and ethics. Mavis asked Peggy to look at the philosophy statement she handed out and adapt it for the VR Council.

### Section 121 Panel

Section 121 representatives Arlene Templer, Quintin Kingfisher, Sharyl Wells, Mavis Young Bear, and Max Bear talked about the Section 121 Programs on their reservations.

### **Friday, July 28**

Preston Stiffarm, Gros Ventre Tribal representative, opened the meeting with a prayer.

### Field Services Update

Bob Jahner gave a general overview of VR field services, and pointed out that VR has 4 main field offices and 7 additional sub-offices located across Montana. VR serves about

8,000 people a year, and about 900 of these people enter employment. The budget this past year has been very tight, and we are constantly analyzing expenditures to see if we will have enough money to serve all eligible consumers. If we do not anticipate that we will have enough money a year from now, we would need to start implementing Order of Selection now. Order of Selection is the method of prioritizing which consumers will receive services and which will be placed on a waiting list. The highest priority would be the consumers we are currently serving. If they have a plan developed, they would continue to receive services. The next priority would be the most significantly disabled consumers. This is a federal requirement—that the most significantly disabled consumers must be served before the less significantly disabled ones.

Bob reviewed three proposed policies/procedures/rules: (1) IPE Timeliness Policy; (2) Presumed Eligibility Procedure; and (3) Benefit Limitation Exceptions Rule. The IPE, Individual Plan for Employment, is the document that guides an individual consumer's journey through Vocational Rehabilitation. No services may be provided unless they are specified on the IPE. In the past, VR's policy has been that the IPE must be completed within six months of the consumer becoming eligible for services. The proposed policy would shorten that time to 120 days. The Presumed Eligibility Procedure relates to consumers who are already determined eligible for Social Security disability benefits or Supplemental Security Income through the Social Security program. By federal law (the Rehabilitation Act), these consumers are automatically eligible for VR services, and this policy details that procedure. The Benefit Limitation Exception Rule allows the VR Director (Joe Mathews) to make exceptions to policies in certain cases. The Council made some suggestions to Bob, and he will discuss the policies again with the Council before they are finalized.

Mavis and Buster presented gifts to Joe Mathews, Arlene Templer, and Peggy Williams.

#### Committee Meetings

Public Awareness, Transitions, and Native American committees met. There was not time to report back to the full group, and the minutes are attached in the appendices.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am.

## **Appendix A**

### **Public Relations Committee Minutes**

#### **July 28, 2006**

Present: Wayne, Denise, Carol, Ruth, Peggy, Maureen, Paul, Claudette, and Joe

Peggy indicated she would send brochures to Denise and Claudette to distribute in their communities. Peggy would like to know which offices or agencies these were delivered to.

Denise suggested we give her video to Charles Sadler, our liaison from Washington, D.C. when he visits for the "meet and greet". Also discussed was putting the video on the internet and/or sending it out to relevant agencies. Peggy will check into making more copies of the video.

There have been 150 individuals registered for the independent living symposium, which is excellent.

Mariene Disburg appeared on the Community Pulse program in Helena. At our next meeting we will view the Community Pulse video.

Marketing suggestions from the group included:

- Appearing on the "Coffee Break" radio program in Helena
- Advertising on the side of buses and emphasizing "Opportunity" as a word associated with VR – VR services provide opportunities for individuals.
- Provide information to the schools regarding VR services and emphasize that no matter the disability, there is help out there for individuals.
- Attend job fairs – these are attended by VR in some areas
- Plan some activities for October as it is "National Disability Month"

Denise indicated she would be willing to go to the schools and giving talks to classes regarding VR services. She will submit a proposal to the committee for review, and possibly give a couple presentations at schools in her area in the month of October.

**Appendix B**  
**Native American Committee**  
**July 28, 2006**

1. **Hold the summer Council meeting in Fort Belknap in conjunction with the Milk River Days, July 26-28. Do cultural training for the Council and staff, and cultural immersion on the Thursday night of the meeting.** *Completed: This meeting was held in Fort Belknap at the Little River Learning Lodge/ Fort Belknap College. Mavis Young Bear provided multicultural training for VR professionals. The entire council toured the Cultural Center at Fort Belknap College. Entertainment included the Fox Fiddle Players (Jim Fox is a VR counselor at Fort Belknap).*
2. **Contact the Crow Agency to discuss the possibility of them applying for the 121 grant.** *Barbara Varnum left a message with Reno Charrette, Governor's Indian Affairs Coordinator in early July. Reno is a member of the Crow Tribe. Barbara will leave Reno another message if she does not hear back from her.*
3. **Invite the 121's to the July Council meeting in Fort Belknap. Have a panel of 121 representative speakers. Focus on the subject of 121 issues.** *Completed: All of Montana's six 121 Project Directors attended this council meeting. A Section 121 panel was held where the Project Directors updated the council on their individual programs on each reservation.*
4. **Encourage VR representatives to attend the Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR)** *Completed: this will be an on-going goal. Barbara Varnum attended the 2006 mid year CANAR conference. The annual CANAR conference will be held in Washington, DC in February 2007.*
5. **Send a MVR representative and MVR Council member to the Native American Brain Injury Association Conference in June.** *Completed: Joe Mathews, Disability Services Director, and a number of MVR counselors attended the conference this past June.*
6. **NA Committee meet the 121 representatives to discuss public awareness and what their needs are.** *Completed: All of the 121 representatives attended the NA committee meeting. We discussed:*
  - *Updating the Cooperative Agreements between Montana VR and the Tribal VR programs.*
  - *Possible replacement for the 121 Project slot on the MVR Council. Arlene Templer has been hired for a new position, and will come off of the council in January. Mavis Young Bear stated that she was interested. Sharyl Wells will talk to George Kipp, Browning Project Director, to see if he is interested. There is an application process, and the Governor's Office makes the final determination on who serves on the council.*
  - *The 121's would like to receive copies of the MVR council meeting minutes from here on out. Barbara will inform Peggy Williams, council coordinator.*



- *David Boyd stated that he would like to see a Native American represented on one of the other council committees. He asked the committee to think it over and we will again discuss this at the next council meeting.*
- *Bob Jahner, MVR Field Services gave a brief overview of the CASE-E program that he is working on for MVR. This is an electronic case-management system.*

**Maintain communication with the 121 Projects.** *This will be an on-going goal for this committee. Barbara Varnum currently serves as the 121 Project liaison for MVR.*

**Appendix C**  
**Transition Committee**  
**July 28, 2006**

Bob Jahner, Dick Trerise and Meredith Ewer Speck (from the Governor's Office) attended a meeting on Transitions on July 26, and they discussed the results with the Transition Committee. Many groups were represented at the meeting and discussion centered on a previous transitions report by the Rural Institute. The next step in this process is for Meredith to summarize the meeting and make a proposal to the Governor's office.